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When you hear the word "hero," whom do you think of?

A famed astronaut who beat the odds and saved his crew?

A Vietnam War veteran and Medal of Honor winner?

A vaunted Hollywood actor with a history of helping veterans?

Whichever flavor hero you chose, chances are he was in North Chicago Friday for a ceremony honoring the future Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, which will be the first joint Veterans Affairs/Navy hospital in the country.

James Lovell -- the astronaut best known for his crisis-plagued voyage on Apollo 13 -- and actor Gary Sinise spoke at the event in honor of the health facility, set to open in 2010.

Medal of Honor recipient and Vietnam War veteran Al Lynch also attended the festivities, as did dozens of local and national luminaries.

Lovell, 79, said he was flattered to be associated with the institution but wanted the focus elsewhere.

"I'm overwhelmed, but in reality today, we're really honoring the servicemen who served our country -- both active and veterans," Lovell said after a ceremony in front of hundreds at the Great Lakes Naval Station. "This is really going to be a big boost for them."

Sinise, who met Lovell while filming "Apollo 13," agreed.

"(Veterans of the Vietnam War) deserved our gratitude, and they never got it," he said. Sinise said his and his wife's veteran relatives inspired his involvement with veterans' issues. "They do not have to do this work."

The day of festivities continued after the ceremony, with the Lt. Dan Band, which includes Sinise, also playing for Great Lakes sailors.

Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon Mansfield called the array of decorated military personnel present at the ceremony dazzling but agreed caring for veterans and their family members was the focus of the day.

"We need to recognize that when they come home, if they come home injured, that they deserve the very best medical treatment this nation can provide," he said.

The Lovell Center will serve an estimated 100,000 veterans, active-duty recruits and their family members.

Rep. Mark Kirk also spoke and said he, local lawmakers and veterans fought hard to prevent service cuts and closure at the VA hospital in North Chicago. Work began this summer on a new parking garage, hospital entrance and ambulatory care center.

"I think we've turned a corner," said Kirk, who told the crowd Lovell's name was perfect for the hospital. "Jim Lovell is the living inspiration for Americans."

Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, said \$130 million in federal funding will help create a cutting-edge facility.

"It's a culmination of a seven-year battle to keep this hospital open," he said. "Now, not only do we have a huge expansion, but with Jim's name on the front, it just changes everything for making this a leading federal veterans and Navy institution."